

# Double-Sided Vigilance

by Ashesofthefirststar

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Summary: The law abiding NPA Agent, Byakuya Kuchiki, begins an investigation on a vigilante organization taking out members of the Japanese mob. As he begins to suspect Ichigo as the front man for the group, the two become intertwined in a game of cat & mouse. As the agent goes deeper into the case and deeper into the mind of Ichigo, the lines of right and wrong begin to blur.

## 1. Chapter 1

**\*\*Summary:** The law abiding Ex Captain of the Homicide division turned NPA Agent, Byakuya Kuchiki, begins an investigation on a vigilante organization taking out members of the Japanese mob. As he begins to suspect Ichigo as the frontman for the group, the two become intertwined in a game of cat and mouse. As the agent goes deeper into the case and deeper into the mind of Ichigo, the lines of right and wrong begin to blur. Despite knowing their enemies, the two grow closer in their twisted and unexplainable attraction for each other.  
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**\*\*A/N:** Hey readers! If you've read any of my work before, you probably know how I operate, but if you're new, I hope you enjoy this little piece of fiction. Let me explain a few things about this story. First and foremost, this, like many of my other stories, is a slow burn. If you're looking for something light or FLUFFY, this is NOT the story for you. This is somewhat of a psychological thriller and highly inspired by other works, such as Death Note and The Boondocks Saints. However, it is most definitely a ByaIchi fic.  
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**\*\*This is an A.U,** and because of that, go easy on the characterization. I try really hard to keep the characters the same at their crux, but some characters, namely Ichigo, are pretty different from cannon. Though it should be said that this is because Ichigo undergoes life altering events and loses himself. Slowly he

will become more like himself in the manga. \*\*

\*\*This story is set in modern day Tokyo, so to keep it as realistic as possible, I did a lot of research into their culture. From the gestures they use, to the way the policing system works, it's all pretty on the nose. If something needs to be explained, such as what certain titles and gestures mean, I will make sure the reader understands. \*\*

\*\*I'm not sure how often I'll update this story, since I still have three other active stories, however, I already have the first two chapters written and am deep into the third. The update rate will probably depend on the feedback this story gets, so if you really like it and want the next update soon Fav/Follow/Review this story. \*\*

\*\*Good vibes!\*\*

\*\*xXx\*\*

\*\*\*I never feel more human than when I'm chasing real monsters." - Mustang \*\*

\*\*xXx\*\*

\*\*Hero\*\*

Bracing himself against the harsh crisp winds, Agent Renji Abarai took a sizable sip of his convenient store coffee before making a displeased scowl. Still, he knew if there was any chance of getting through the day, he'd need it. He pressed the butt of his Caste Mild cigaret to his lips, jaundicing his lungs with nicotine while the subtle vanilla flavor simultaneously ridded his taste buds of the abhorrent piss brew.

"Renji-san," Agent Byakuya Kuchiki stated as he came to stand beside the man. "Do you smell that? It smells like depravity and death," he noted before pulling out a cigarette of his own and lighting it up, not needing to cup his hands against the hefty breeze because of his wind resistant zippo. His chosen brand was called 'The Peace' and cost twice as much as most cigarettes in Japan. Renji would often tease the man, saying he was paying an arm and leg just to get lung cancer, but Byakuya did like the finer things in life, and if he was going to die from such a habit, he'd be damned if he was going down sucking on substandard tobacco.

With a smirk, Renji inhaled deeply, taking in the aroma of Japanese BBQ being given off by a nearby restaurant. "Ah, smells like nostalgia to me, Keibu."

Rolling his ash eyes in a mild fashion, Byakuya said, "I haven't been your Keibu in quite sometime." Pausing, he took a drag of his cigarette and added, "A nostalgia I'd rather not revisit."

Giving the man an aslant glare, Renji stated, "You'll always be my Keibu to me. Besides, being back at our old stomping grounds brings it out of me." Finishing the rest of his coffee in one valiant gulp, Renji made an uncouth sound, sticking out his tongue slightly before ditching the styrofoam cup in a nearby trash can. "Though, I don't miss the coffee in this area." After a brief pause and a few more

deep sharp drags of his cigaret, Renji added, "Come on, admit it, you missed getting your hands dirty. You were the one who requested this."

With the slightest of smirks, signaling the mixture of frustration and amusement that Byakuya felt, he countered, "Perhaps a little, but then again, I may just be as delusional as you, Arabia." After a deep sigh, he added, "Let's just hope we can make a difference this time."

Something unheard of was happening within the streets of Tokyo. Well, a multitude of unheard events were occurring as a domino effect. Four months ago, members of the Inagawa Kai, the third largest family of the Yakuza crime syndicate, had started dropping like flies in seemingly organized and swift assassination. At first, it was thought that these murders were committed by competing branch families and that fractures had begun to take place within the Yakuza. It reeked of a possible mob war.

It soon came to light that the situation was much more peculiar than a simple mob war. First off, the assassinations seemed to have no pattern or reason. For the members killed ranged from different gangs, each with hands in different dealings. More so, through the use of criminal informants, it was revealed that no other branch families seemed to be benefiting from the deaths. There were no fractures or possible take overs. It seemed these were murders for the sake of murder.

At first, the National Police Agency of Japan couldn't fathom the possibility, but after months of dead ends and dead bodies, deductible evidence had surfaced. Exactly a month prior, a branch gang involved in human trafficking was hit while moving a shipment of what they liked to call merchandise and what other people liked to call their kidnaped, deeply missed family members. Not only were the victims released and unharmed, but the van that was responsible for moving the shipment was marked with the words Forty-Seven Ronin.

Such a simple phrase was enough to absolve the clouds of denial that reigned over the ruling government of Japan. Forty-Seven Ronin told of a tale of retribution seeking samurais whom enacted their revenge against the government who killed their leader. Though the lore became synonymous with loyalty through Japan, the bare bone moralism behind the story was transparent: vengeance, taking law and justice within one's own bloodied hands.

After that eye - opening situation, the NPA began to work under the assumption that they were dealing with their very first veritable vigilante. Someone or some group were working around the law to eradicate the seediest most nefarious mobsters Tokyo had to offer.

In a way, to some members of the NPA, a mob war was preferential. You see, though Japan is known for being a beacon of safety, that in no way meant it was without crime. In fact, the Yakuza family were so organized in their crime, that it hardly ever affected the everyday citizens of Japan. More so, many corrupt police were aligning themselves with the syndicate in hopes of giving the fraudulent appearance of security while also stuffing their own avaricious pockets with 'look the other way' money. The corruption of the Mob

was controlled and monitored through means of corruption, meaning, in ways, Yakuza was a controllable evil. This self proclaimed vigilante, however, was not. He, she, or them, were unpredictable, an unknown variable that acted out of the control of The Criminal Investigation Bureau.

The media frenzy of such an event became intractable and trouble causing, for they coined the the vigilante 'The Ghost of Tokyo' for his impalpable and swift movements. Most of Tokyo's denizen had mixed emotions of such a faction existing, while head members of the Yakuza became restless, readying themselves to take their own actions against the assassin. It was a combination of an undermining of police power and possible large scale retaliations that caused the NPA to become involved, for it was becoming a matter of national security.

The hierarchy of policing within Japan worked as such: The National Police agency worked to determine general standards and policies that trickle down to The Criminal Investigation Bureau. The NPA had no active police of their own, but in times of national crises, the agency is authorized to take command of prefectural police forces. Still most involvement is rather hands off and involved communication via technology. It is almost unheard of for an agent to go into the trenches, actively involving themselves in the thicket of investigation. However, Byakuya Kuchiki had always been a special case.

Byakuya Kuchiki was the ex captain- titled Keibu - of the homicide division of The Criminal Investigation Bureau, and had a reputation for being one of the most effective yet virtuous investigators of his time. For ten years, the man yielded to no one and refused to negotiate with known criminals. Unlike most other Captains, Byakuya did not turn the other cheek to the Yakuza and ruthlessly went after the syndicate at any chance he had. It kept the Captain up at night, for he abhorred the idea that badge wilding officers would play nicely with mob members all for their own selfish gains, and for ten years, him and his division worked tenaciously to eradicate it. In ways, Byakuya was a loose cannon himself. For even the NPA often had a laissez faire handle on the crime syndicate, claiming that though it was a broken system, it was system that worked and kept most members of Japan safe. The ex captain had to disagree, which is why he always attended to his duties with an iron fist of justice.

It was nothing short of a miracle that Byakuya had not been taken out for his relentless and cohesive actions again the mob, for his rate of successfully solved cases surpassed any captain in the history of the CIB. It was that exact reason that the Yakuza family idled their hands, because there symbiotic relationship with law enforcement could be at risk if they eliminated one of the shrewdest investigators to bless the CIB. In the end, the man had barely left a scratch mark in their debased dealings and was ultimately a flight risk the family took in stride.

Even after ten years of fighting against the tide, Byakuya too had realized that he was fighting a losing battle. For it was the mechanisms around dealing with police corruption that kept change from occurring, and if Byakuya wanted to fight against said venality, it would be by means of changing these debased laws. As such, he moved up the latter and resided amongst the piranha's, hoping one day to gain a position powerful enough to enact real change. His

Lieutenant, also known as a Keibuho, Renji, followed in suit. For none believed in Byakuya's moral compass and mission of integrity more so than him. Only now, the two Agents worked as equals.

It had been just over a year since he'd, at the ripe age of thirty four, was promoted to his position. Yet, as they say, one can run from their past, but it never truly leaves them. No, the past was just a dormant tumor that came back with a vengeance once it was stimulated correctly. Though, the analogy did lend itself to make it seem as if he had no other choice, when the exact opposite held true. He had asked to have a hands on involvement in the investigation, if not insisted, and because of his history and track record, they were inclined to allow it. Something about this mission had tickled him, piqued his interest to say the least. For the whole situation seemed as such a moral gray area. Byakuya, being a man who valued the law above all else, abhorred the idea of using criminal activity to stop criminal activity, it was everything he had been working against. For that reason, he could not permit the existence of such a ratification. Despite that, he could obviously see the difference. For while the justice system used crime in such a manner to benefit themselves, this entity seemed to work for the sole purpose of annihilating the syndicate, possibly pushed by their own unquenchable thirst for revenge and justice. It was that reason that the man couldn't find it him to be disgusted by this autonomous culprit(s), for their motives resonated with the man in certain aspects. None the less, he would put an end to them if he did so with his last dying breath.

So now here he was, back in the trenches of his humble beginnings. Home sweet hell.

Both men stood in front of a what would look like a normal Pachinko parlor if it weren't for the police tape enclosing the establishment. For the shop was located in Kabukicho, the largest red light district in all of Asia, and despite the appearance of safety and the jillion of tourist that congregate, criminal activity oozed from the seedy underbelly. Quite a few establishments had been taken over by the Inagawa Kai and doubled as an area of assemblage and safe haven for discussing the intricacies of whatever corruption was the flavor of the week. This specific parlor had already been suspected of illegal gambling- allowing their customers to gamble with money instead of tokens- and apparently that was the least of their transgressions.

An anonymous call came into the station early this morning, a few days after Byakuya had been put on the case, reporting six men dead. The owners played it smart and cleared out while all the veterans of the district would move to the other side of the street to keep themselves from possible association with the police or establishment; no one was talking.

Disposing of his cigarette, Byakuya lifted up the police tape and dipped under, Renji in suit. The two entered the establishment and were met by the headache inducing flamboyancy of Pachinko machines. It was one long aisle lined with apparatuses that looked similar to pinball machines, yet vivid with effulgent colors. It was like an arcade for the lovers of luck. Both men walked down the aisle, stepping over an array of cloyed chairs, tokens, and beverages strewn in a moment of disarray. When the two men approached the end of the spectacle, Byakuya headed straight for a doorway at the back of the

establishment. The door was wide open, but also covered with police tape, and lead to the basement area of this establishment. This is where the diabolic magic happened, and Byakuya could practically smell the pugnacity of death in the air.

Stepping over the tape, the two agents descended down the staircase, only to be met by the buzzing of police officers and forensic workers. The rumble of speculative chatter and the flashing of cameras filled the murky ambiance as the two took in the sight. It seemed like a rather run of the mill operation, semi nice couches, a bar in the back, and a table festooned with enough illicit drugs to keep the whole red light district on a cloud of belligerency for a week. Six dead mobsters were splayed out in a grimy display, surrounded by shambled playing cards and spilt drinks, not one with a single fatal wound. The precision of these executions were practically palpable. Whoever took these lives did so with such dexterity, not wasting a single movement. There was an obvious artistry hidden within the morbidity, a dance that had been rehearsed time and time again. Their rigor mortice and ashen faces only triumphed in horror by the amorality of the lives they lived. Though, for a crime scene, the whole display was rather mild, considering some of the nightmare inducing blood baths Byakuya found him self knee deep in.

After a few moments of observational by-standing, their presence was noticed. "Renji fucking Abarai & Byakuya fucking Kuchiki," the blithe voice of Shinji Hirako rang freely as the man ambled towards them, arms open. By this point, Renji was walking towards the man, enthusiastically preparing to return the embrace of his old comrade. "The Dream Team, as I live and fucking die, man."

Hugging his friend tightly, Renji's face lit up with the most beamingly nostalgic grin Byakuya had seen the man wear in a while. "Ah, you're not dead yet," Renji teased, patting the man on the back.

"Yet," Shinji reiterated.

He took no time of slinging his hands in his pocket and sauntering towards Byakuya, shaking his head in an amused disbelief with tongue in cheek. "Geez, the Great White himself. I can hardly believe it."

"And I can't believe that as a Keibu you still don't know the correct way of addressing your superiors," Byakuya deadpanned, though with no sincere malice behind his words. The decorated members of the Homicide Division were his only true family for almost ten years, especially after the death of his life partner, and despite the air of arrogance Byakuya carried with him, they knew it to be apart of the man's dynamic charisma.

A comical grin lit up the captain's face as he held out a hand for Byakuya. "And I see you haven't changed one bit," he noted, obviously happy about the lack of evolution in the man's personality. When Byakuya reached out to shake the man's hand, Shinji gripped it hard and pulled the man in for an unexpected gesture of affection, shocking him slightly with a hug. "Don't you dare try to shake hands with me, you bastard. We're family and I haven't seen you in a year," he chided, patting the man's back. Though not a very affection man by nature, and despite the confusion caused by the quick embrace,

Byakuya's features soften and he resigned to return the hug, surprising himself with how much he missed all of this.

With one more pat before releasing his vice grip on the man, Shinji bemused, "Man, the Great White in the flesh. It's like seeing a ghost."

Narrowing his eyebrows in a disapproving fashion, Byakuya questioned, "I haven't heard that nickname in ages, do people still regard me as such?"

With a sly grin, Shinji confirmed, "The only thing more tenacious than you were the rumors about you."

"And everyone of them well deserved," Renji praised, winking towards Byakuya.

Within the millisecond between Byakuya inhaling and exhaling a deep breath, a jaunty set of flailing limbs rushed him, jumping on the man while simultaneously nosing her arms around his neck. "The legend lives!" The women boomed eagerly, hugging him to the point of asphyxiation.

After gathering himself from the impact of two unsolicited embraces in a matter of a minuet, Byakuya finally looked down at the owner of the stifling appendages. "Not for long if you keep cutting off my air way, Yoruichi-san"

"Oh Keibu, oh Keibu," the women singsonged, "It's good to have you back."

"Now Yoruichi-san," the man said flatly, "don't be rude. Hirako-san is your Keibu now, I'm just here to make sure it stays that way." Raising an eyebrow, Byakuya continued humorously, "Four months and you still haven't caught him, Hirako-san? I thought you better than that. My longest open case was only two."

Putting his hands up as if he being held by gunpoint, the man countered humbly, "Hey, I never claimed to be able to fill your shoes. I'm just going to sit back and watch you do your thing on this one."

"It's hard to fill the shoes of someone who has such giant feet," Yoruichi teased, nudging the man. Turning her attention to Renji, the women greeted with a smile, "And don't think I forgot about you, Big Red."

"You better have not," he teased back, taking no time in hugging the women. "The mystery team unites again."

With a roll of the eyes, Byakuya mocked, "You're getting ahead of yourself, as always."

"Ah, let me have this one Byakuya-san. It's just like old times."

Knelt down with camera in hand, forensic worker Yumichika took photos of strewn bottles, or in his opinion, absolutely nothing of significance. Allowing his camera to dangle from his strap and drop lazily against his chest, he took a contemplative sigh. "Useless,

absolutely useless." At the feeling of his camera strap being pulled against his neck slightly, he turned his head to see a pair of intense brown eyes looking down at him, holding out a Styrofoam cup.

He gave a cursory glance at the cup before crinkling his nose in disdain. "Get that pathetic excuse for a beverage away from me," he demanded.

"Tech," Lieutenant Madarame Ikkaku-san smacked his gums, narrowing his brows at the rudeness. "Just take it, dammit. You look tired."

With a roll of the eyes, Yumichika stood up and took the cup, holding it as if it was infected with flu causing germs. "What do you want? You always want something," he asked suspiciously, finally relinquishing his wariness and letting the coffee graze his lips.

Smiling maniacally, the man shrugged his shoulders half heartedly. "I want a lot of things, a new motorbike, a lifetime's supply of sake, a date with you."

Yumichika tugged at his bottom lip slightly before he narrowed his eyebrows at the man. "Are you really asking me on a date while we're standing amongst dead bodies.. again?"

Ikkaku reasoned, "In my defense, I only see you when we're around dead bodies."

Yumi chuckled and gave that saucy smirk that not only said how beautiful he was, but that he knew it too. "You have absolutely no tact," he insulted.

"I got other things though," the man returned the smirk, caught up in the others glow. "Like a good job, a roof over my head, and the ability to make you laugh. That's something, right?"

"And don't forget persistence," Yumichika added, his usually sharp features lighting slightly.

"See," the man noted arrogantly, "you're falling in love with me already."

"Ha," Yumichika let out a derisive laugh. "You were right, you're very laughable Keibuho Madarame-san."

"Yeah, and you're too damn formal," the man grunted in complaint.

Grazing his eyes around the room slightly, Yumichika nodded in the direction of the new arrivals. "Great White is back, can you believe it?"

Rolling his eyes, he muttered bitterly, "Yeah, fucking awesome."

Smirking playfully at the reaction, Yumichika asked, "What's your deal with him anyway?"

Trying to appear aloof, he just shrugged his shoulders and said, "Nothing", the guy's just got the personality of a lamp post. I guess that's what people are into these days."

"I actually really enjoy his dry humor," Yumichika shrugged his shoulder in suit, his eyes gleaming with an impish curiosity. "More so, he really cared about all of his comrades, even if he did come off cold sometimes. Even you he cared for."

"I think you just think he's good looking," Ikkaku speculated, barely hiding his envy.

As it was the most apparent thing in the world, Yumichika reasoned, "Well yes, but that goes for three-fourths of this division." When Ikkaku just grunted in response, Yumichika added, "You really are the only one in your unit who has a problem with him."

"Well, ya know," Ikkaku said, no longer really feeling in the mood for this conversation- not if Yumichika was going to croon over glacier face that is. "I have always liked to go against the grain."

Unable to hide the smile that painted his alabaster face, he chuckled, "You really are cute sometimes, Keibuho Mandarame-san."

Such a simple compliment rejuvenated Ikkaku's confidence, causing him to grin widely. "Cute enough to get a date?"

Throwing the man a disparaging glare, Yumichika warned, "Don't get ahead of yourself. I also find puppies and babies cute."

Ikkaku just sighed and rolled his eyes as Yumichika handed him a sheet of paper. "Do you mind heading this report off to Agent Kuchiki-san?"

"Why don't you do it, since you have such a crush on the guy?" Ikkaku groused.

"I do not have a crush on him, I just appreciate all beautiful things," Yumichika reasoned with a smile. "Now, stop being jealous and take this to Agent Kuchiki-san, and if you know what's good for you and your career, you'll try to get on the task force he'll be preparing for this case."

"Like I care about those kind of things," Ikkaku grunted, snatching the paper from Yumichika who was smiling victoriously.

Straightening his poster, Ikkaku swaggered right over to Byakuya who still stood among a group of his collages. "Agent Kuchiki-san," Ikkaku greeted with a less than enthused tone. "This is the on scene forensic report. It really doesn't look to promising."

With an amicable nod of the head, Byakuya took the paper and said, "Thank you Junsabachan. Madarame-san."

"It's Kibue-ho now, actually," Ikkaku corrected bitingly.

Raising a cursory eyebrow, he barely lifted a steady eye on the man. "You replaced Renji-san?"

Stepping in before his pugnacious lieutenant could take the moment of confusion as a personal insult on his abilities, Shinji gave Ikkaku an encouraging slap on the shoulder and said, "He sure did. Ikkaku-san is top notch, this kid."

After blinking pensively for a moment, Byakuya concluded, "I never took you for a man who had much interest in advancement."

"I'm not, but someone had to do it, and when you're good you're good," Ikkaku answered honestly.

"Right," Byakuya let the scantiest of smiles tug at his lips. "I'm sure you make a great Kibue-ho, Madarame-san."

"Yo, chrome-dom, did you not see me standing here or something?" Renji asked, sounded mildly offended.

"How could I not with that bright ass hair of yours?" Ikkaku jested, moving over to give one of his long time friend a fist pump.

"It's called trying to be professional, besides It ain't like we don't see each other outside of work."

"You? Professional? Since when?" Renji teased back.

Looking up from the report, Byakuya shook his head and huffed. "As nice as this is, I rather keep the sentiments away from the cadaverous," Byakuya said, now walking around the room, taking a closer look at the different variables of the crime, or for him, they were more like animal tracks.

"Are you kidding me? Some of our best bonding moments were around stiffes," Shinji reminded, following in suit.

Renji watched from afar, recognizing the predatory spark returning in the man's eyes. He loved to watch him like this, filled with a latent intuition for the human condition, the true apex predator. It had been so long. "This is pretty normal for us, Kuchiki-san."

"Yeah," Yoruichi challenged with a smirk, "But let's see if a year of paper pushing dulled those instincts."

Waffling his eye's in her direction briefly, with the hint of a smirk in his tone he disputed, "It's like riding a bike, Junsu-bunchÅ• Yoruichi-san."

"Right, Solving a mass murder case, riding a bike, totally the same."

"So the reports saying they were poisoned," he looked back and forth between mobsters, "though that's obvious." Pacing thoughtfully, he thought out loud, "Clean clean, always so clean."

"Tell me, what do we know about these men?"

This time, Ikkaku spoke up. "Their two different gangs, but from the same family, the Inagawa Kai. We're figuring this was a pretty important meeting, because this fat fellow over here and that one," he nodded towards a lithe black haired corpse retired over a mess of

broken glass, shallow cuts decorating his face. "They're both shatei gashira."

Byakuya looked on intently at the collapsed corpses with narrowed eyes. Shatei Gashira were regional bosses, heading over a number of smaller gangs within the area of Tokyo. Though the Yakuza liked to call themselves one big happy murderous family, they were much more like a multimillion dollar company, complete with CEO's, presidents, division managers, store managers, and fodder. And like any cut throat company, they worked effectively, like a fine oil machine cranking out debauchery at record rates. They ran the game ruthlessly, having a monopoly on hedonic damnation and selling it for retail prices. Word on the street, a baggie and some heavy petting only put you out about eight thousand yen. Who knew dirtying one's soul could be so economical?

The two lost souls, well, compared to higher up members, they were rooks in this game of chess. Still, whoever this group was, they didn't just throw a pebble in the world pool. This would cause ripples all the way up. At this rate, the Yakuza would start moving pieces too.

A shiver of frustrating jealousy worked it's way through Byakuya's tendons. For ten years of his life, in which he sacrificed more than a few sleepless nights, he never made a ripple this big. Playing by the rules, making every decision based on virtue, and he never once felt such a triumph; he never once kinked their cogs in such a manner. However, the envy was not enough to make him consider sinking so low.

"Fujimoto Emi and Kato Hayato, correct? I recognize them now that I take a better look. I tried for these men a big portion of my career." He looked over to the table situated in the middle of the bone orchard, taking in the jagged calligraphy reading: Forty - Seven Ronin, in red marker.

'Forty-Seven Ronin,' Byakuya introspected. After a transitory moment of silent thought, he said with an edge of derisiveness, "Forty-seven Ronin, the tale of vengeance, huh?"

"Seems pretty detached for vengeance," Renji speculated. "Doesn't seem too blood thirsty."

"Yes," Byakuya agreed, "but we could be looking at this message the wrong way. Forty-seven Ronin wasn't just about enacting revenge, it was about the annihilation of a corrupt government." Vacillating his mute glare in between Shinji, Renji, and Ikkaku, Byakuya asked, "And who's the ruling government in Japan?"

Renji started to reply, but cut himself off at the realization that he wasn't quite getting the implications. It was a trick question.

To Agent Kuchiki's surprise, it was Ikkaku who first spoke up. "The crime syndicate, they run everything."

"Right," Byakuya nodded. "Many would like you to believe that our government heads run the show while keeping the Yakuza in check, but it's quite the opposite. In every ruling nation, it's the criminals of the world who pull the strings, and we're just the puppets. Our

idea of government is more or less a giant smoke screen." Pulling out a cigaret and lighting it up, he continued, "No. they're sending a message that they're trying to eliminate the true source of the corruption, since our acting government so often looks the other way. This is what I believe."

"So," Shinji inquired, "you see no personal revenge behind these killings?"

Pushing out a cloud of smoke, Byakuya replied, "I see a tragedy and strong convictions caused by such. No one just commits to something of this significance without provocation. You could say these were the acts of a mentally unstable narcissist trying to enact their own justice, however, I see little of the anger or emotions that usually accompany those types of killings." Pausing briefly, Byakuya concluded, "He is a strange one."

"He?" Shinji speculated.

Nodding, Byakuya responded, "This does have sort of a masculine feel to it, don't you think? I'm not so sure why myself, because I feel very little personal intimacy involved in this. It's just my gut, I suppose. "

"But women are more likely to use poison," Ikkaku pointed out.

"Women serial killers are, and there's a personal enjoyment in that. No. poison was a professional choice for this person, because it was the most efficient tool for the job."

Erecting an eyebrow, Renji asked, "You don't think this guy finds enjoyment behind this?"

Without hesitation, Byakuya responded, "That I'm not sure of, but I will find out. I'll get behind the mindset of this man."

"You mean woman," Yoruichi chimed in, walking over from where she was stationed on the other side of the room.

"What?" Byakuya urged.

A smile crept upon the woman's face as she said, "You four are all going to want to see this."

With a deliberate purpose, the women walked towards a black fold up table, upon it sat a lap top. Sitting down, her fingers tapped away at lightning speeds, only out shined by the zealotry of her words. "We finally got all of this security footage cleaned up from the camera over there by the bar. It was the only operational one. Byakuya, you're never going to believe the show this chick put on for us. It's almost like she wants to get caught."

For the first time since Byakuya stepped upon this peculiar crime scene, he let his confusion emoticon. "But they're usually so clean, so careful."

"I know," Yoruichi agreed. "Almost sounds a little too good to be true." The woman raised a dubious eyebrow, and before starting the video, she said, "But a picture's worth a thousand words and a videos

worth a million."

Byakuya watched on ardently as Yoruichi began to explain exactly what the group was looking at. Around the table sat the six men, all with a different racily clad women slung across their laps like some kind of objects. Their leather covered bottoms bouncing in an eager attempt of showman ship, all nibbling at the greasy lobs or double chins of their well endowed mobsters.

"No doubt these are ladies of the evening," Yoruichi observed.

"These girls, I've dealt with them before on other cases. They're call girls for some of the seediest men in the syndicate," Byakuya added, leaning in closer to the monitor, ingraining the image in his memory.

"Then this was just another Saturday evening for them," Yoruichi jested.

"It was probably one of these girls who left the tip," Shinji speculated.

"Now, something here doesn't belong. Can you find Waldo, Byakuya?"

Narrowing his eyebrows at the screen, he saw it. Moving closer as if the track was palpable, he said, "Gloves. The girl with the long brunette hair and leather jacket dancing for Fujimoto, she's wearing leather gloves."

"Mhm," Yoruichi fast forwarded slightly, "you would be correct. After a little bit of suggestive dancing, she makes her way over to the bar and pulls out a bottle and six glasses, and lays them on a serving tray. Then she gives one to each of the men." Pointing at the screen, she said, "And look at this." The gloved killer stood briefly behind one of the mobsters who offered the girl on his lap a sip from his unknowingly poisoned cup. The assassin swiftly made a decision, grabbing the girl's chin and kissing her deeply, as if there was true euphoric pleasure from the exchanging of spit. All the mobsters hooted in pleasure as they chugged down their death tonics merrily, their perverted fantasies being tickled one last time. That's when the first one dropped.

"Back it up. I need a full body shot," Byakuya demanded, and Yoruichi did so promptly. For a moment, Byakuya stood quietly inspecting the figure on the tiny glowing screen. Finally, he stood back straight and pulled out another cigarette. A resigned look shined through the smoke as Byakuya concluded, "That's not a women." Yes, Byakuya wasn't a stranger to the male physique. Enough to know when one was right in front of his face.

Bewildered looks washed over his comrades as they all inched closer to the screen, trying to find what Byakuya's seasoned eye's saw differently.

"Are you sure?" Ikkaku asked.

"Positive," Byakuya answered shortly.

"With an ass that nice?" Yoruichi baffled.

Amused, Byakuya pointed out, "Men can have shapely backsides too, Yoruichi-san."

"You would know, wouldn't ya?'"

"True, he has a very lithe body, but I see a ton of subtle muscles in his physique. I'm sure that's the reason he's wearing more clothes than the rest. Also, that adam's apple speaks for itself." Flicking his cigarette carelessly, he leaned back in on his palms, scrutinizing, preparing, tracking. "And don't bother trying to run his face through the facial recognition database."

"Why?" Shinji asked.

"Because, he's wearing prosthetics." Pointing at the image of the man's face, he said, "Zoom in, please. It's the slightest of nuance right there where the chin meets his ear. Whom ever did them, well it's close to perfect. Under the lighting, unless you're looking for them, they're practically undetectable."

"So that means.." Renji faltered

"That means, even though we have this video, we don't have a solid lead." Tapping his fingers in repetition, Byakuya said, "We saw the whole thing play out, but this man still vanished without a trace." Pausing briefly, a gleam of an intrinsic animalistic pursuance permeated his features, and without realizing it, the smallest of smirks pulled at the crevices of his lips. For a man like Byakuya, he loved the hunt. More so, the challenge that came with it and the gratification of knowing he could put away just one more of Tokyo's lowlifes. Despite whatever this man's intentions might be or what morals he thought he had, he was a murderer and arrogantly took life as something that's his to condemn. With such hypocrisy, murderers killing murderers, this amaranthine cycle of death would just keep burning until the whole world was a holocaust. There had to be morals, there had to be a line in the sand, or everyone would just be sociopathic charlatans drowning in their own twisted sense of justice; for this was what Byakuya believed fervently.

He looked intensely into the green orbs of the man, figuring that his eyes probably weren't green at all. No doubt that with all the trouble he went through to be in disguise, he took time to put in contacts. Though no matter the pigment, the eyes were a doorway, a scintilla of light into the mind of their owners. Many times, Byakuya had looked into the eyes of criminals and could read their every intention, fear, and weak spot. Yet where he would usually find blood-lust, deranged animus, unsatisfiable edacity, and trepidation caused by erratic emotions, in this man's eyes, he saw nothing. Absolute oblivion. There was no guilt, no joy, no sorrow, only the pulse that thumped within the cavity of this man was proof to being alive. He seemed completely detached, unfeeling, a monster.

Perhaps a monster that killed bad men, even a monster who saved that call girl's life, despite it being of no benefit to himself, but to Byakuya, he was a monster all the same. He had to be, for anyone who could kill a man with nothing but emptiness in his eyes couldn't be human at his crux. Something cracked within this once man, evolving him into the accursed vessel that murdered these mobsters without so

much as a flicker of the eye. Though the cop in him wouldn't allow himself to overlook aspects of this man's personality just because they conflicted with the heartless personage. To catch a monster, you must put yourself in a monster mindset and understand their every idiosyncrasy. Still, with this convoluted man, this might be Byakuya's greatest hunt yet.

"He's good, very good," Byakuya speculated.

"Man, watching you work, Kuchiki-san, it's like watching one of those crime shows." Shinji teased, "You're too good, figuring all of that out in just a few minutes."

"I told ya'," Renji added, gripping Byakuya's shoulder. "It's just like old times."

"And I recognize that look in your eyes, Byakuya," the woman smirked. "It still gives me chills."

"Don't sound so surprised," Byakuya noted, a tinge of smugness covering his words. "It'll take a lot more than a little bit of paper pushing to dull my instinct."

"Oh yeah, just like old times," Shinji grinned.

"Now, show me the rest. I want to see what he does next."

The group watched as the call girl's scattered and shrilled. None taking the time to stop and help, fearing their illicit dealings, or more importantly, their lives, could be in danger if they intervened. Only one remained, the gloved impostor. Quickly, he reached into his jacket and pulled out a red marker, leaving his trademark sloppily written message.

Afterward, he took out a cigarette and lit it up before giving a barren glare towards one of the mobsters. Something must have sounded off behind because he turned quickly, his fingers ghosting over an area that Byakuya assumed housed a veiled weapon of some sort. Though the noise wasn't the dangerous sort, but the 'fatty', as Ikkaku so elegantly put, grousing and coughing in extreme pain. He was on the cement floor, clutching onto the arm of the couch for dear life, as if he could survive through this if only he stayed upright. The two seemed to exchange some words yet there was no audio.

"After this, I'll contact the NPA and tell them to send over someone who specializes in lip reading, since both of them are facing towards the camera. I want that conversation, it could house the lead we need."

With their short conversation done, the man looked directly into the camera, and despite the smirk on his face, those haunting eyes were frigid. The man put his pointer finger under his right eye and pulled the skin down while simultaneously sticking out his tongue, a common symbol of mockery within Japan.

"Sassy and a nice bum, exactly my type," Yoruichi jested.

"Perhaps you two can exchange addresses when we finally catch him," Byakuya spat caustically, never peeling his eyes from the the monitor. "He'll have plenty of time for a pen pal when he's sitting

behind bars."

"Wouldn't be the worst guy I've dated," Yoruichi groused.

After the taunting gesture, the screen went black.

Bemused, Byakuya asked, "Did the video cut off there?"

"Actually, that's the most important part, Byakuya. From the time stamp on the video, this happened around eleven at night. Well, that was the same time that an electrical shortage happened in this district." At Byakuya's narrowed brows and shocked face, she continued, "The power was cut three blocks in every direction. Until I watched this video, I had no clue it was correlated."

"Maybe it's just one of those crazy coincidences," Ikkaku mused.

"Coming from the guy who keeps a Shichifukujin wall scroll in his living room and a Daruma doll by his nightstand," Renji mocked. "You've always believed in luck. I'm half certain that's why you stay bald, so ya' can rub your own head for good fortune."

"Ah, shut it. I guess I forgot to do it today, because here I am having to listen to your big mouth."

For a moment, Byakuya sat in contemplative silence. "A coincidence is this crime happening only a couple of days after my decision to pick up the case." Tapping his fingers against the black foam surface, he declared, "No. This was a strategically organized maneuver."

"So these guys are pros," Shinji observed with a grin. "And now we know for a fact that it's these guys, not just one guy."

"Yeah," Renji agreed, "I don't care how good this guy is, there's no way he could be doing this alone. Though I have a feeling that it's always the same one doing the act itself."

"Why?" Ikkaku asked

"After working under the best for so long, I know a thing or two about feeling out a crime scene. Every person leaves something distinct at a crime scene that makes it feel authentically theirs. It's like a bad stench." With a shrug of the shoulders, Renji mused, "Besides, if it ain't broke don't fix it, right? This guy obviously knows what he's doing."

"But why?" Byakuya asked, back turned to the group. "Why three blocks in every direction? This is a failsafe escape plan. With all the commotion and darkness, there's no way our suspect was spotted leaving. Still, he'd only need to cut the power from here to the direction he was traveling. So why the extra?"

A moment of silence came over the group before Ikkaku yawned slightly and awkwardly rubbed the back of his head. "That's an easy one," he mused, getting the attention of Byakuya who turned and looked at him directly. "The guy's boastin', puffin' up his chest is all. They want us to know that they're capable of it and that they won't be intimidated."

"Do you want me to make some rounds, Byakuya-san? Go see if I can bat a few eyes, flash a few smiles, get some neighborhood folks talking?"

"You have a powerful smile, Renji-san, but I highly doubt it can gift a person with the power of night vision."

"Don't waste your breath anyway, the people in this area will tell ya' exactly where to shove your smile."

"Actually," Byakuya corrected, turning back towards the monitor, "Renji has a rather warm presence about him. He always had a knack for getting witnesses to talk. That was something I never had much luck with, getting others to open up." With a sarcastic roll of the eye, Byakuya flatly said, "I can't possibly fathom why."

Howling, Yoruichi nudged the agent slightly. "Yeah, with the way you smile all the time and with your sweet attitude, makes you wonder why you don't have witnesses coming to you."

"If smiles and sweet words were all it took to solve murders, then we'd all be out of a job and replaced by a group of toddlers," Byakuya reasoned, a slight smirk tugging at his lips as he eyed the last frame of the video.

The wheels were churning in his head as he stared intently. Everyone stood by waiting for their orders, for they were well versed in the agent's quirks. He was absorbing every sense he'd taken in since he stepped into the room, tossing them over until he saw everything from every possible perspective. He was preparing for his hunt, mentally compiling all of his equipment.

Once the man's innate analytical mind had devised a plan, he wasted no time in picking up the track. "Keibu Hirako-san, we'll be heading a task force compiled of ten other officers, of course, not counting Agent Renji-san. I will leave it to you to compile the folders and records of these chosen agents, and hand them off to me for approval."

"Gotcha', Kuchiki-san, I'll have them for you by noon."

"Make it eleven, and do not make me have to wait on those"

"Geez, you're only back for a whopping thirty minutes and you're already falling back into your old position nice and easy. Careful, you may not want to leave," warned Shinji.

Intertwining her fingers and stretching, Yoruichi said, "Fits like a nicely worn in coat, doesn't it, Byakuya?"

Merely glancing her way, he replied, "Even a comfortable coat is removed in the summer. Now, the longer you sit here chatting, the more apt you become to missing my set deadline. To make up for your time consuming penchant of running your mouth, I'll make your list one person shorter." Turning towards Ikkaku, Byakuya asked, "You're in, Keibu-ho, if you so choose to accept."

Ikkaku smirked slightly, extending his torpid arms behind his head in an aloof fashion. "Ya', I'll do it. Knowing some of the guys on the squad, you'll need someone like me."

"Well you certainly have the bark, but we'll see about the bite," Byakuya cocked an eyebrow dubiously.

Slinging an arm around Ikkaku, the blithe Renji enthused, "Ah, he's right, Byakuya-san. That big ol' head of his is filled with street smarts and gut instinct."

"Yes," Byakuya agreed, "I see that." His voice still didn't sound all too convinced yet he continued. "We need men like that to work this case. So now nine folders, Keibu Hiriko-san."

Walking away, Shinji taunted, "You're too kind to me, Boss man."

With a quick look over his shoulder, Byakuya returned the taunt, "That's Agent Boss Man to you," before giving his attention back to the others. "Keibu-ho, I need a criminal profiler right away. Contact her, brief her, and have her ready for a three o'clock meeting with the task force."

With a nod, Ikkaku departed, leaving only Renji and Yoruichi. "Junsa-buchÅ• Yoruichi-san, I need-

His orders were cut off by the women pulling out a stack of thin blue binder with an impish grin. "A bottle of sake and your own personal boy toy? Yes, I know, but all I can offer is an neatly organized abridged version of all ten hits so far to provide your task force."

"It seems you're ahead of the game, Yoruichi-san," he noted, sounding mildly impressed while scanning the binders. "Now I remember why I kept you around despite your constant harassment."

"I always did have to one up you, Byakuya-san."

"Say's the Junsa-BuchÅ• to the NPA agent," he said, eyes still gliding across the contents of the binder.

With a flippant throw of the hand, Yoruichi said, "Okay paper pusher, I still out did you at just about everything at the academy, especially Judo. I just don't want to be a Keibu because I've seen how cranky it's made you."

"Yeah, she really did show you up at the police judo competition a couple of years back." Renji smirked, "It was pretty awesome to watch. Yoruichi-san is one of our best officers. If it wasn't for the backwards way of thinking everyone has about women officers, you'd be a keibu-ho or higher."

With a shrug of the shoulder, she chide, "Forget that, If I wanted to be a Keibu or a paper pusher you think I'd let something as archaic as that nonsense stop me? Pfh- I like doing my own thing too much to be tied down like that."

"That just makes you the most stubborn yet talented Junsa-Bucho in all nine units. Homicide has always been grateful for you," Byakuya expressed offhandedly

Eyes still in book, Byakuya felt a swift and vigorous kick to his

thigh, making him have to brace the flimsy foam table for leverage. He looked up to a scowling Yoruichi and met her with the same indignation. "Junsa-Bucho, I hope you do not take our friendship as a sign that you can disrespect your superior."

"I was just checking to see if you've been keeping up with your training," she winked. "No way you'd be standing after one of my kicks if you hadn't. You passed."

"All I do is train. I don't need one of my subordinates assaulting me to prove such."

Yoruichi just chuckled loudly at that, her scowl dropping instantly. "Ya' hear that, Big Read? We go through high school, college, and the academy together, and he still refers to me as an underling. How cold." The women mocked shivered.

Renji laughed, smiling brilliantly. This felt nice, standing around in such a breezy way even in a high strung situation. Especially the look of passive enjoyment that shined through Byakuya's edifice of a face. That was what really lit him up. Even if the hardened agent wouldn't admit it, it was refreshing to be doing tangible good everyday again, no matter how small. It felt good to just put the mistakes behind them and start forgiving themselves for the tragedy they'd been unable to prevent. Though he tried to seem unaffected, it was Byakuya who bore the cross of their fallibilities the most. "I know it's hard to tell, Yoruichi-san, but there's love within his frigid words. You just have to listen really, really closely,"

"I already call you both by your first names. What else could be expected of me?"

"I'm not complaining," said Renji. "First name bashes was a miracle as it was, took six years of working together everyday."

Byakuya had delved his attention back towards the binder. Through his reading, he managed the smallest smirk before he said, "Yes, and to think I didn't even particularly like you for the first four years. That should make you feel even more achieved."

Lazily leaned against the wall, Renji simpered, "But eventually I wore ya' down, just like I do with everybody. It's the hair." He then flicked the rolled up foil of his now empty cigarette pack at Byakuya as he place the last smoke in his mouth. Byakuya just glared up at him disparagingly and muttered 'child' under his breath.

Rejoining the conversation, Yoruichi said, "So if I'm so great, where's my invitation to be on the task force, huh?"

Flickering his eyes up from the sentence he was reading, Byakuya sighed, "So that's why you kicked me? It's very child like to throw a tantrum over assumptions." Flatly, yet with full eye contact, Byakuya assured, "You're always on my task force. That goes without saying, and you know I don't like wasting words on obvious things. Besides, one way or another, you'd make sure to be on the task force, rather I okayed it or not." Eyeing the woman's bag, he said, "And I suppose you have your own binder."

She packed up her stuff with a wicked grin. "Of course. Did you think for a second that I really thought you could do this without me? I

just like making you say nice things. It's like watching a dog try to lick peanut butter off it's nose, hopeless yet somehow still really funny and cute."

"Mh," Byakuya gave a noncommittal huffed, "Use those harassment techniques for good and see if you can't rush order the forensic units final report." Narrowing his eyebrows, he reminded, "No galavanting, I need you back by three. We need to determine what kind of poison they used and if we can possibly track where or how it was purchased."

Picking up her bag and slinging it around her shoulder, Yoruichi winked in the two men's direction before walking towards the stairs. "You boys have fun playing cops for a while," she waved over her shoulder.

Renji gave a humorous look towards the women before she walked up the stairs. Then he gave his attention back to Byakuya, who was still glued to the laminated pages of The Ghost and every track he left behind, everyone so silent, but deadly. It wasn't the fact that Byakuya had already read every single case report in the assassin's file until he knew them better than the Bushido code he build his policing around, it was the involuntary twitch of the eyebrow and intense eyes that were concerning. Years of partnership left Renji well aware of the little quirks of Byakuya better than the agent would ever openly admit to, and eyebrow twitching usually signified confusion or frustration.

Under his breath, Byakuya mumbled, "He didn't take any of it.."

"Byakuya?" Renji said, giving him an odd look. Often, when they were alone, Renji dropped any of the social expected formality. Some people genuinely didn't care about that kind of stuff, like Yoruichi and Ikkaku, but Byakuya held such formalities as apart of his pride and code of ethics. So the fact that he allowed it was amazing in and of itself.

After another moment of gaping at the pages, he looked up and cleared his throat while closing the book. "Yes, Renji-san, we have plenty of work to do ourselves. First we're going to go locate those women from last night and question them, then we're going to start readying ourselves for this meeting later today."

Flexing his arm and putting a hand on his bicep to show his eagerness, excited about doing field work for the first time in a year, Renji boomed, "You had me at ladies. Let's do this!"

Knowing Renji to be a complete bumbling mess around exposed women, to the point he could barely look to enjoy what was causing his awkwardness, Byakuya found Renji's declaration amusing. "I'd say you charm the pants right off of them with your childish blushing, but they're not to keen on those, yes?" Byakuya deadpanned, now walking towards the stairs.

The coroners were wrapping up bodies as all on scene police officers wrapped up their work. The two agents were the only ones left lingering besides the still corpses. It was a weird life, being a homicide detective. After you did it for so long, you'd be surprised how relaxed you could allow yourself to be, even with the big dead

elephant in the room.

Walking behind in suit, Renji pleaded, "Oi! Oi! Byakuya, let's stop and get some Dried yakisoba for the trip. I didn't eat this morning"

"Absolutely not. You should have ate already. We're investigating murder, not going for an outing."

"Ug, that's why I need it ! What taste better with Justice than yakisoba?" Renji asked lamely.

"Cigarettes."

"Well I need those too! I just smoked my last one. Come on, let's stop by the store. It'll take five minutes."

Now at the top of the stairs, Byakuya huffed, "I see somethings never change, you're still a unprepared man child. I predicted this and bought your brand of cigarettes while I picked up mine this morning. We'll stop at the restaurant next door and get a seaweed salad or something akin to it. I can't have you lagging latter by running your body down with such junk food."

Smiling widely, Renji nudged the agent slightly. "Look at you being concerned for me. I'm going to have to tell Yoruichi about this."

Mutely, Byakuya gave the man an aslant look. "Fine. No cigarettes for you."

"What? Wait, but why?"

## 2. Chapter 2

**\*\*AN:** Hello my beautiful readers! I got a fair amount of followers for this story just off my first chapter, so I decided to go ahead and give you guys the second! Please keep in mind that while this is a romantic fic, the crime/psychological aspects of this story are just as important. As my beta says, it's like watching Bones or CSI. The romantic aspects will take a while to show up, but your patience will be rewarded. **\*\***

**\*\*I'll** respond to comments at the bottom. I got quite a few followers, but not to much feedback. Please remember that the more you comment on this story, the more I'll find time to update it. I'm still working on other stories, but if people take a liking to this one more, I'll throw a little more of my time behind it. Though, for those reading my other stories, don't worry, I'll still be updating those regularly. **\*\***

**\*\*My** beta is reading this story for the sake of leaving me commentary, however she isn't editing it. While I have pretty good grammar over all, I sometimes make silly mistakes or overlook something. If you see anything major that just peeves you, let me know. **\*\***

**\*\*The** terms to remember are phrases that pop up in this chapter. I was also thinking, because this story is get's so convoluted, that I

should start each chapter with a summary of the last. Let me know if you think that would be helpful!\*\*

\*\*Good Vibes. \*\*

\*\*Terms to remember\*\*

\*\*Yakuza: This is the Japanese mob. This includes three main families, non of with are connected.\*\*

\*\*Inagawa Kai: This is the third largest family in the Yakuza and their located mainly in Tokyo.\*\*

\*\*Ishikawa Goemon: The is basically the Japanese version of robin hood.\*\*

\*\*Sensei: Sensei means a few different things, but in the context of this chapter, it means doctor.\*\*

\*\*YÅ•gisha: This is a term for suspects in Japan. Being even suspected of a crime in Japan basically makes you the lowest of the low and you usually won't be addressed with the formal honorific.  
\*\*

\*\*M.O: This means model operandi(It's a latin term) It's used by law enforcement to describe a particular manner a crime is committed or habits a criminal holds. \*\*

\*\*xXx\*\*

\*\*The mind of a monster. \*\*

Chosen officers of the homicide unit were filling in one after the other, non dare, nor wanted to, be late. For most had miss him, yet just as importantly, feared him. Kuchiki Byakuya didn't do tardiness. Let acrimonious wrath fall down for those who entered after them.

The day of trailing left the agents with nothing solid. That was one track that had died out. Apparently, one of the girls hadn't shown up to the call, however, the red-lights finest, the most hush-hush, top-dollar ladies for the most low-down scum, said she's never called out and simply hadn't shown up. Though, a girl parading as her replacement had shown up calling herself- himself- Masa, therefor the company had never been informed of her absence. Afterwards, the duo made a pitstop at the unheard from call girl's apartment and found her safely in her home. Apparently she had fallen into a deep sleep out of nowhere and woke up feeling 'under the weather.' No doubt it was The Ghost's handy work.

Masa meant straightforward and honest. Byakuya thought the irony was almost palpable and started to wonder if every single thing this man did was intentional.

As the two walked into the precinct, Byakuya was close to breaking his own timeliness commandment. Either way, he strutted into the department like the assiduous agent he was, carrying his cigarette right past the threshold and towards the meeting hall.

"Hey, isn't that Keibuho Yumichika-san from forensics with

Yoruichi-san?" asked Renji

Byakuya noticed the couple right before they turned the corner a few paces ahead of them. "I tell her to bring me a report and she brings me the units Keibuho. I suppose I shouldn't complain."

Renji laughed. "What do the Americans say? Straight from the horse's mouth, I believe. If the horse is here, that means it has something good to say."

Walking into the meeting, everyone was gathered. As the two agents entered, the task force stood and bowed, giving their customary greetings and smiles. Yumichika and Yoruichi stood up at the front, speaking to Shinji.

"Hello Kibeho Ayasegawa Yumichika-san," Byakuya greeted urgently. "What do I owe this honor?"

"Does that ever get tiring," Yoruichi interrupted, "saying so many words every time you address someone?"

Byakuya merely huffed in dignification and Yumichika giggled slightly.

"Hello Agent Kuchiki-san. I know it's unusual for someone to come down themselves, but this report is rather convoluted. I thought I'd save you some trouble and explain it to you in layman terms. Also," he smiled brightly, "I wanted to greet you properly, since we'll be working together again."

"Yes. I do appreciate you taking the time to do this. It's a pleasure to be working with you once more."

"Likewise, and it's no problem at all. Homicide has always been where I get my most interesting cases. You guys keep me vital and youthful," he said, handing over a file with his final report. And Byakuya actually smiled, which made Ikkaku want to kick his habitually glacier like face in. He smirked occasionally, but smiles knew no home on Kuchiki's face. Though he knew that this probably had little to do with the agent actually liking Yumichika and more to do with the fact that the forensic officer was such a sociable and charming person that even Byakuya couldn't help but return some of that temperament. Realizing this, Ikkaku merely scoffed an envious scoff to himself and continued to listen.

"So your victims were murdered with cyanide," Yumichika explained. At Byakuya's fretted brows, Yumichika said, "I know, I had the same reaction at first. It's rather easily obtained and not all so illegal. However, this poison had a lot to say when I looked closer. It's Sodium cyanide, a water soluble type, but that's not the most interesting part. It's mixed with seawater. This is a common practice among illegal cyanide fishermen. It breaks down into cyanide ions and acts much like carbon monoxide poison."

"So you believe that they could have obtained this through illegal fishermen?"

Tilting his head as if to say 'not quite', Yumichika clarified, "Yes and no. These guys seem rather professional. So their supplier is probably a fisherman, but not just some random one. I expect whoever

sold this to them is just as professional and skilled in poison dealing as they are in illegal fishing."

"Illegal fishing is rampant in Tokyo. Finding the source will be quite the challenge, if possible at all." Byakuya frowned slightly.

"Agent Kuchiki-san, you have such little faith in me," the man grinned. "You don't think I'd run all the way down here just to tell you that, do you? I'm insulted," he teased.

Shinji bantered something about how he should get use to that feeling around Byakuya and Byakuya replied with all the charming arrogant air that characterized him. "I suppose even a man of my prevailing abilities can dull somewhat after a year. Excuse me, I'm still oiling my gears, so to speak."

The officer smiled and said, "I'll let you off the hook this time" before he clarified. "When tested, I found traces of a rare alga called *Symbiodinium trenchi*. It lives on coral reefs and started popping up about six years ago as a natural defense to global warming, and has just recently found it's way close to Japan. The only island within Japan's domain that houses this kind of alga is Okinotorishima. It's completely inhabited, a paradisiacal dream for illegal fishermen. The island does house a research facility, but they could easily be being payed off or blackmailed."

"This is a great start. Thank you for work, Kibeho Ayasegawa Yumichika-san." Byakuya's fingers curled around the file, his pulse picking up slightly at the development. It looked like he found his next track, and that only made him more hunt ready. After what happened before he was promoted, he thought this sensation was lost to him. That adrenaline he felt when in the thick of a case, it could be so overtaking, addictive even. It made him feel so human, as if his existence mattered the most when he was putting away the inhumane. He relished and took pride in using all the skills and knowledge he had spent years cultivating to take down those the government let roam. Like any addiction, it came with much sorrow and lose. There were cases he couldn't forget and people he'd never get back because of this addiction, and for that he felt a guilt he could not express at the almost euphoric feeling washing over him once more. This had to be his last case.

Pushing past his huntsman high, he thought logically. "Though, knowing this group, this could be some elaborate way to make us lose their scent. We'll look into it as soon as possible."

After exchanging good bye's, Yumichika headed out, winking at Ikkaku on his way out the room.

With that, Byakuya stood at attention, Shinji and Renji to his side. The room was rather simple, a large round table with all needed officers seated in wait, an outdated never ending coffee pot that wouldn't be replaced due to funding shortages, a tea kettle, a projection screen, piercing fluorescent lights, and of course, ash trays galore.

Clearing his throat, Byakuya began. "All of you in this room are acquainted with me and accustomed to how I run things, but It has been a year, so let's refresh." Giving a passive glare around the

room, Byakuya said, "Take note of this dreary room because this is where you'll be spending a large amount of time until this case is closed. If you don't drink coffee, I'd pick up the habit, and I'd make sure to bring food unless you want to starve. There will be sleepless nights, but you are not to nap on my time nor near this table. I do not abide lateness and I hold no sympathy for excuses."

He scanned the room to see a mix of weary and resolute expressions. "You're all here because you're extremely capable officers, the best of this unit. Therefore, I expect the best. Also, each of you is here by choice, so in this room, your personal ongoings are of no concern. If this rigor is not something you can balance with your personal life, then you'll lose no respect from me if you chose to reject this position. Lastly, and most importantly," his voice darkened a hair, filling the room with a seriousness that everyone took in stride. "I know that this case is in a moral gray area for some. I'll even admit, it's not your typical bad guy we're dealing with. However, despite what convictions you may hold, you're not to let them cloud our mission. If you feel as if you cannot think objectively and put aside your own beliefs, then remove yourself at once. We're treating this like any other case. Do we have an understanding?"

A resigned silence covered the room, not a single person budging from their spot nor even making eye contact with the door. In fact, there were quite a few pleased smiles. These were career cops, officers who took joy in defending and abiding by the law. It was that reason that, despite how harsh his opening speech may have appeared, that the officers who were brave enough to work homicide revered the man as a great leader. He was tough yet fair, valiant and virtuous, loyal and cunning, and most were thrilled to have the chance to work with him again. To truly appreciate the way Byakuya Kuchiki solved crime, it needed to be experienced. For the men and women in this room, not a single oath was taken without great consideration. The police in Japan had been founded by samurais and built off of those same dogma's held by their predecessors. This was a proud group of individuals, all gunning for the chance to make their career's with this once in a lifetime case.

Byakuya simply nodded at this. "Alright then. This unit is not only known for its success rate, but personally, I know it to be filled with extremely effectual officers. You're all not only brimming with talent and strong will, but you're also filled with integrity. I know we will solve this case, and I will assist you with all of my abilities." Glancing to Shinji, Byakuya smirked and deadpanned, "I'm happy, yet equally surprised, that my influence has been carried out through Keibu Hirako-san."

The group laughed at this while Shinji replied, "Nah, I'm a big old softie. You just struck a fear in them that didn't leave for a whole year."

"Despite your laid back appearance, I know you to be a superb Kibeu. Your methods just happen to be a tad bit more gentler than mine."

"We did always have that good cop bad cop thing going for us," Shinji smirked.

"Junsu-Bucho Yoruichi-san, please pull up the slide." After a few

brief moments, the projector was fully operational, displaying a crime scene photo from what they believed to be The Ghost's first hit. Sprawled bodies covered a high class restaurant that had been rented out by some high tier Inagawa-Kai members: two \_wakagashira and three fuku-honbucho \_who each governed several gangs within a region. Five meals and two bottles of sake later, they'd started feeling oddly sick and their eyesight started to deteriorate. This wasn't on account of the alcohol. They're food had been garnished with high doses of some genetically modified hemlock and worked unusually fast. By the time they realized what was happening, the first man fell down, completely paralyzed. There was no one to save by the time the ambulance was on the scene.

"What we're dealing with here is unprecedented. Trust that the group doing this is organized and impeccably trained across the board. Hackers, professional fighters, poison dealers, makeup designers, they have plenty of resources. By comparing the way these murders were executed, to the handwriting left at the last two scenes, we believe the person who commits the murders is the same man every time." A picture of the disguised man popped up on the screen. "The Ghost himself is more than likely trained in a number of fighting styles, in which he utilizes silent killing techniques. Trust that he know's our judo and quite a bit more. From the couple of hits that did involve hand to hand combat, it seemed the man was using a fighting style called Krav Maga, which does not concern itself with the safety of others and is intended to kill as quickly and effectively as possible. Also, his ability to examine and reconnoitre the places the murders were held tells us he's also proficient in skills such as espionage. Over all, as a killer, this man is proficient and deadly, swift and untraceable. He is a natural assistant only made more fierce by this team he has backing him."

Gesturing for Yoruichi to click to the next slide, he continued. "Though I talked about his hand to hand skills, this man is a rather passive killer. He has no one particular way of killing other than clean, so his techniques range and are always chosen based on a situation to situation basis. Though, even in the unpredictable nature of these hits, there is still predictability that we can gage. For one, the murders are performed in very detached manners. Particularly, he is fond of poisonous and toxic gasses. Though he is not above creative methods." Looking towards the screen, he noted the ghastly display. "His largest and probably his easiest hit was twenty five men at the same time. He was able to lock them in the confines of their meeting location and bust a major pipe, drowning them all."

"He has yet to use a gun in an altercation, however, I'm certain that he carries one and is probably more efficient than any Japanese officer could hope to be, seeing as they're hardly utilized. I believe the group holds back on using guns because they're harder to obtain and veil, not to mention, they tend to leave quite the mess. His weapon of choice is a fourteen inch, nylon strung nunchaku and his trademark is killing silently, quickly, and without blood from behind. Still, even he's only used this method twice, one of those times being at the human trafficking hit last month."

"His stealthy nature alone will make this a challenge, but more so, it's difficult to find a place to start looking when the murderer is in no way connected personally to the victims. So we'll need to

deduct what we can about this man to paint a clearer picture. We know this man is no older than thirty and of Japanese descent, probably with a background in military and/or law enforcement." Cocking an eyebrow, the man speculated, "In fact, he could very well still be in law enforcement."

"From the hits he choses, I believe who ever this man is has some personal stake in this. Though the way he kills is rather detached, there must be something that prompted him to become this modern day Ishikawa Goemon. The Forty Seven Ronin makes me believe this is a personal enmity with law enforcement, and the government in general, towards their indulgent treatment for the Yakuza. Possibly he had family members taken at the hands of the Yakuza and felt spite towards law enforcement."

The agent became more austere than usual, his voice heavy with the sound of importance. "However, from the composed and cold manner this man kills to the dead look of his eyes, one thing is very clear to me: he's unfeeling and can kill a man without a moment's hesitation. It's possible he feels nothing towards other people at all and takes killing as a trivial manner. A man like that is dangerous. We can not discount the possibility that he'd be willing to kill an officer or a civilian need be."

From beside Ikkaku, a beautifully aged women with long razor straight black hair and soft blue eyes commented. "Very astute observations, Agent Kuchiki-san. Though, I do believe your theory could be refined a bit."

"Hello, Unohana sensei," he nodded in her direction. "I was actually about to hand the room over to you. I'm sure your expertise could shine a great deal of light on who we're dealing with."

The women walked over to join the agent's standing up front. "Well four hours was not much of a notice. Luckily for you, I had been following this case closely," she said with a tender smile.

"I figured as much. You have always enjoyed an interesting case, and The Ghost is quite the conundrum." Turning to address the room, he explained, "Many of you may know Unohana sensei from prior cases. She has her doctorate in clinical forensic psychology and works as a profiler. She'll be helping us narrow in our search." Gesturing for her to take his spot, he said, "The room is all yours."

With that, Renji, Byakuya, and Shinji also sat around the table as the women sat down some files on the table and smiled at the room. "I'd first like to clarify that without actually sitting down with a yÅ•gisha, everything is educated speculation. However, there are certain personality traits that a crime scene leaves behind which threads a much clearer story, you just have to know what perspective to look at things from. Certainly, this man's crimes show us his story is much more interesting than it maybe appear on the surface."

"I agree," she continued, "about the the history in law enforcement. Possibly military also. Though," she tapped her chin inquisitively and stepped closer to the screen. Pointing at the projected images, she proclaimed, "If Agent Kuchiki's theory is correct, that these crimes are based in an antipathy towards law enforcement's hands off treatment towards the Yakuza, and I believe it is, then it's safe to

say that he is no friend of the police, or more so, that the police is no friends of his. With his distaste towards law enforcement, I can't imagine him residing amongst them." She turned back to the attentive assemblage. "He's low key. With the work he's doing, I doubt he's an active officer." The woman's lips vibrated thoughtfully as she took a sip of her coffee. Breaking her lips from the cup, she reasoned, "He's a lone wolf, I presume. This mission of theirs, it's this man's baby."

Agent Arabi leaned his head back lazily in his swivel chair and shut his eyes in a thoughtful manner. Leaning forward, he perched his cigarette in the crevice of the glass ashtray situated between himself and Byakuya. "What about his group? How can we be certain that it isn't someone in the background who's pulling the strings or orchestrating this whole operation."

"Or maybe they hired him," Shinji poised. "The way he kills so coldly and meticulously, it seems very professional."

"Ah," Unohana pointed out, "I did say it was his baby, but it does take a village, as they say. Still I have little doubt he's the inciter. First off, hired swords are often hired to do singular hit jobs that have little moral grounding. Something of this magnitude, these murders which are based in personal morals and have so many risk is not the typical MO for a hired killer. No professional assassin would intertwine themselves in something so convoluted. More so, this operation takes a lot of trust and a lot to gain. Everyone within this group has a reason for being there, and it it's not about money. These people trust each other and work towards a common goal, at least to a certain extent. You can't exactly trust a professional killer, they're not known for their virtue or morals," she speculated with a hint of amusement in her voice. "I believe he dirties his own hands because he has the most to gain. That leads me to think that it was this man, the one we're calling The Ghost, who actually orchestrated and formed a team for this engagement. So we know what they're trying to accomplish, but the why will help us narrow down the search"

Blowing out a cloud of smoke, Byakuya crossed his legs and poised, "I still stand by my earlier statement. Someone doesn't just do something so dangerous and life altering without provocation. I believe something very personal happened to this man, a tragedy perhaps, a death of a loved one that sent him over the edge."

"Or it's just some twisted guy playing god," Renji speculated.

"If that was the case, why would he have these people backing him? A group this organized wouldn't just throw their weight behind some wacko throwing down arbitrary divine justice. These guys behind him probably all have their own reasons for doing this too, tragedy or not." Shinji commented, stretching his bone-weary body to refresh his coffee cup.

"God does have disciples," Renji noted, chewing on a coffee stirrer.

"Though I do believe this man is playing god, no matter how just he believes himself to be, I agree with Hirako-san. I don't think these are the action of some maniac with an inflated sense of self. It lacks the emotion, the joy, and the self aggrandizing that someone of

that temperament would have."

"You say playing god, Agent Kuchiki-san, but is that necessarily a fair assessment?" Unohana paced back and forth, the tips of her heels echoing from the laminate tile floors. "Do we not have some unspoken international no-no's that most civilized humans agree upon, such a murder or rape? Military who have to take the lives of others based on what they believe is right or what their government believes is right, is that playing god? What about the death penalty? As a race, we've been murdering for the greater good since our inception, and for the most part, it's truly in the name of justice over personal egotism."

"Look at the nature of each of his crimes," she threw Byakuya a deliberate look, her crystal eyes hardening in thoughtfulness. "He only murders high trier members or fodder that have been at the right hand of upper Yakuza members for years. They're all murders. He's never once killed any under aged members or basic fodder, which make up the foundation of the Yakuza. It be a different conversation if he was killing anyone that broke the law, like petty thieves or prostitutes, anyone who didn't fit into a skewed vision of his own righteous utopia, but that's not what this man's after. In fact, he even saved that call girls life, though it was of no benefit to himself. Also, as I'm sure you've noticed, Agent Kuchiki-san," she hummed, tapping the edge of the wooden table in front of Byakuya. "At the seven out of ten hits, there was a large amount of money, all left at the scene. If this man thought of himself as some god among men, wouldn't he feel entitled to the money?"

She shook her head in a definitive no. "This man's intention is glaring, from the nature of his crimes, to the forty-seven ronin, he want's to protect the people from the Yakuza because he feels the government is leaving behind a great deal of slack. His intentions are not something selfish like godship, but built on a strong moral code."

With the fingertips of one hand pressed to their corresponding digits, Byakuya held his hands at chin level, apprehensively swallowing down the woman's words. He saw the truth in them, but something about the idea conflicted him. Those cold unfeeling eyes that seemed to know no love simply wanted to protect the people of Japan? Why? Why when it was so obvious he felt nothing towards the human condition with the way he could watch the light leave a man's eyes and not even flinch? The cadaverous eyes of utter nullity he wore as he spoke to an expiring Fujimoto, they could glacially freeze the soul of a mere mortal. Wouldn't someone with the slightest bit of compassion living within his chest, no matter how justified the cause, show even a whisper of remorse or the sympathy that's supposedly innate to the nature of being a human being? What kind of hybrid was this enigma? For he was not fully a monster, but he most certainly wasn't fully a man.

"You almost sound as if you agree with his actions, Unohana Sensei," pondered Byakuya.

"Rather I agree or disagree is not the issue, Agent Kuchiki-san," Unohana explained, her soft yet warning smile in full action. "I'm simply assessing how The Ghost thinks and his motives. I agree with you, that possibly some tragedy happened to send him over the edge. What that was could be anyone's guess. It could've been a case where

the Yakuza were involved and the police idled their hands, leading to deaths. Perhaps he had a friend, lover, or family member who was taken at the hands of the Yakuza, and the police did nothing. He definitely has a hero complex, that is certain. He wants to protect people so the same tragedy doesn't befall on their heads."

Something about the man's motives and the stimulus behind them reminded Byakuya of himself, almost bitterly so. Yet there was a fine line between the two of them, and this stranger had stepped into a territory of no return. Once you step over said line, anything can become justifiable if it's for your convictions. What happened when the death of an innocent stood in between him and continuing to dish out his own personal justice, would that moral code mean anything then? Byakuya didn't believe so, and that's where their paths split them greatly.

As if he read Byakuya's thoughts, Renji asked, "The way he kills people in such a detached manner, the look of nothing in his eyes when he killed those men, how could such a sociopath have the strong moral code you're depicting."

"You're correct that the way he kills is very detached, all ten of them. There done in such a professional and swift manner, that it could be said the man behind them is very phlegmatic towards the lives he takes, that he doesn't feel anything such as remorse or compassion that most people would feel when taking a life." Picking up a binder and turning to a specific page, she laid it back on the table opened to a still shot of The Ghost retrieved from the video footage. "I watched the video footage, so I know what you mean by the dead eyes and frigid temperament," she said, trailing the pad of her finger along the edges of the man's prosthetic covered face, her eyes following in suit. "However," she looked back up to the group, "Sociopathic would not be the correct term to describe this man. It's a very broad term people like to throw around when someone does something morally taboo, but the human psyche is much more complex than that. This man is defined by his lack of emotions, but as a general rule, sociopaths are extremely emotional, they display behavioral problems, a lack of self control, a sociopath would most likely show a personal enjoyment in these murders. "

"Here is another psychological term for you," the profiler said, a hit of condensation behind her amicable tone. "Clinical apathy. Apathy is usually associated with depression, whereas clinical apathy is associated with dissociation. Dissociation is a partial or complete disruption of the normal integration of a person's conscious or psychological functioning. It's most commonly a response to trauma and it's the psyche's way of distancing itself from an experience that it can't handle. If your theory is corrected, Agent Kuchiki-san, his apathy could be directly related to his trauma. That certainly makes more sense than calling him sociopathic, since sociopaths have very little consciousness whereas this man does, or so I believe. It's simple for him to kill, because he justifies it morally and feels nothing towards it. In fact, without this apathy, he'd probably still feel the same way. It just wouldn't be so simple for him."

The seasoned Agent sat in muteness, the look of deep speculation dancing in his eyes and the only sounds filling the room were vibrating overhead lights and the occasional squeak of a chair. The iron curtain of rumination was one no one would open, but merely wait to be pulled back by Byakuya's much deliberated assessment.

Renji addressed the man with a glare of idolatry, noting how the man's gray orbs were shadowed, darkened when ever he was deep in thought.

"Junso-Bucho Yoruichi- san, please start gathering any files on officers who retired or were discharged within the last five years. Only men under thirty. The task force will start looking through them for cases related to the Yakuza, and if nothing shows up there, we'll comb through their personal lives and backgrounds, try to find something Yakuza related there. This will be a case solved by hours of grunt work."

Yoruichi stood to attention, but stopped in front of Byakuya before she left. "And I suppose you'll be taking a stack of folders too, Byakuya?" The woman smirked, anchoring her hand on her hip.

"Of course," Byakuya assured, "I certainly can't allow my men to dirty their hands while I sit idly. What kind of leader would I be? Also," the man added, an impish tonality gleaming passed his flat demeanor, "searching is half the fun of the hunt, Yoruichi-san."

The woman shook head brilliantly and went off in search of the files. "You might have too much fun on this one, Byakuya-san," Renji poised.

"You may even go over your two month record for an unsolved case," Shinji added, "with how elusive this guy is."

Byakuya shrugged his shoulders. "I know my limits, so you may be right on that." The agent finished the last gulp of his coffee, sat the cup on the table, and softly tapped on the styrofoam edge. "Though it would be a worthy opponent if that were to happen. Either way, he will be caught."

"Kuchiki-san, I've been thinking, you believe this man is no older than thirty, correct?" asked Shinji.

"Yes, from his stature and from the little bit of natural skin I could see under his disguise, I believe that's the oldest he could be. Though it's more likely he's around twenty eight."

"If he was a soldier or an officer, and some kind of tragedy did occur, it doesn't leave a lot of time in between to form this super organized high tech assassination team."

Byakuya nodded in agreement. "Yes, I've thought of that also. These connection couldn't have been new. If something did happen to send him over the edge, he most like already had knew these individuals."

"Then isn't it possible he always had these connection, and they've been planning their attack for years now? There's no way to know if we're grasping at straws with this tragedy thing," Ikkaku speculated. "We can't even be certain he was a cop or in the military."

"It fit's the killer's M.O," the profiler butted it. "There's no way to know for certain, at least right now, but it seems likely based on an algorithm we used. One which is based off of thousands of cases

and criminal profiles."

"It especially fits with his protector complex," Byakuya backed up. "Even without this algorithm, from years of cases, you learn that criminals have patterns, habits that they share. It just seems a little off. True, he's likely had these connections for a while, but why start now? If he was a cop, it would make sense that something drastic happened to change his beliefs. These crimes are unprecedented, so something had to have occurred for this group to just start killing this way, and I believe that reason can be found behind their frontman's personal life."

"Yeah, but it still make you wonder why a normal old cop would have all of these connections," Ikkaku groused, popping a cigaret in his mouth as he popped the kinks from his neck.

"I never said he was a normal cop," Byakuya pointed out, erecting an eyebrow at the man as he went to refill his coffee.

"Criminal connections?" Renji thought out loud.

"Yeah, a bunch of criminals turned good guys, fighting the evil of Japan. Sounds likely," Ikkaku mocked.

Swiveling in his chair with all of his misplaced energy, Renji shrugged his shoulders. "You're probably right."

"That may be more than we can hope to figure out with the information at hand, gentleman." Unohana smiled, gathering up her belongs and placing them in her bag. Nodding towards the agent, she announced, "I shall be taking my leave now."

"Thank you for your help as always, Unohana-sensi," Byakuya bowed slightly.

Lines creased from the woman's grin, showing decades of wisdom through her gentle gesture. "I'm sure you'll catch him, Agent Kuchiki- san. You two are very much different sides of the same coin."

Hand gripping tighter around the styrofoam, his fingers searing slightly from the freshly poured liquid, he almost crushed the fragile cup. "Yes, I suppose you're right," he conceded.

With one more smile, the woman was out the door.

Almost in synch with the woman leaving, Yoruichi popped back in. "Byakuya-san, I was on my way to get those files, but a fax came through from the NPA." Handing the man the papers, she explained, "It's the lip translation from the video."

Earnestly, the man's eyes glistened over the pages. His usually stony expression moving minutely, the words causing him a discomfort he tried to conceal.

Noticing the look, Renji pleaded, "Come on, tell us what it says."

**\*\*xXx\*\***

**\*\*clarit:** Your comment made me smile! I put a lot of work in, so it makes me happy that it can be seen in my writing. Lol, right? I love the idea of these two just taunting each other, being all sassy. I usually write Ichigo as the bottom, but that's more because Byakuya's not the bashful type at all. He's mega confident and mature. Yeah, he's reserved, but if he decided he wanted Ichigo he'd get it. Whereas Ichigo has always been shown to be shy about that kind of stuff. I hope you're able to read the Yumi and Ikkaku part of the story one day! Yeah, I was so serious about noting every time something like that came up because I know a lot of people are easily triggered. I'm sorry my ByaIchi part of the story has been kind of lagging, but it's just the way the pacing of the plot ended up working out. Starting in the next chapter, they'll be much more prominent. I can't wait either, their my OTP and I love writing them, so the slow burns are pretty hard on me too. haha. :) Good vibes ~ Ashes. \*\*

**\*\*siwon611:** Thank's love. You're always following and keeping up with my stories, and I dig that. You're the real MVP, darling. :) May the good vibes stay with you ~ Ashes. \*\*

**\*\*Tee:** I hope you liked this update just as much! Thank's for the support. :) Good vibes ~ Ashes.\*\*

End  
file.